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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: December 11, 2007

Buchinger Hopeful the OeVP Will "Come to Its Senses"

¶1. ... regarding the issue of private home nursing care for the sick and elderly, Austrian media report. Speaking on ORF television, Erwin Buchinger, the Social Affairs Minister from the SPOe, said he was "displeased" with his party's coalition partner OeVP for "playing a double game" on the issue. The Minister expressed his outrage over the fact that in Parliament, the People's Party had "voted in favor of the reform package" for private nursing care together with the SPOe, while "at the same time they are protesting against the measures outside Parliament." Criticizing what he describes as the OeVP's "contradictory" position on the issue of private home nursing care for the sick and elderly, Social Affairs Minister Erwin Buchinger said on ORF TV's late night news Zeit im Bild II yesterday that hopefully the People's Party will "come to its senses," use "moderation" in its statements and "implement the joint agreements" reached in cooperation with its coalition partner. The current dispute had emerged when the OeVP moved to oppose the SPOe's push to end the "amnesty" for not officially registered nursing personnel by the end of 2007. However, liberal daily Der Standard runs the front-page headline "Nursing care chaos in the coalition," and reports that the "SPOe and the OeVP are threatening each other" and "are calling for the respective other party to pay for the expenses."

Guilty Pleas in AMIS Trial

¶2. A major trial involving thousands of investors who lost money in the collapse of the financial services provider AMIS got underway on Monday. Because of the large number of claimants, around 15,000 represented by 80 lawyers, the hearing is taking place in a major conference center in Vienna. The prosecution is expected to allege that five former managers of AMIS are guilty of gross professional misconduct causing investor losses of around 60 million Euros. Three of the former managers have confessed that they are guilty, says ORF TV's prime time news Zeit im Bild I on Monday.

"Ten Finger Scans for Trip to US"

¶3. ... says a leading Austrian provincial daily. According to the newspaper, the United States has implemented its plan to further tighten immigration procedures for visitors from Visa Waiver (VWP) countries. As of now, travelers arriving at Washington DC airports will have ten instead of two finger scans taken. US Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff inaugurated the finger-scanning equipment in Washington on Monday, announcing that the new security system will be installed at all US airports by end 2008, according

to independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten.

First OSCE Report on Human Rights

¶4. A leading Austrian daily says that US Ambassador to the OSCE Julie Finley "lost her cool," in the face of the fact that Russia and other former Soviet states simply ignored the presentation and significance of a report on patterns of human rights violations against those defending such rights. The report was presented on Monday, International Human Rights Day, by the Vienna-based OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). On International Human Rights Day the Vienna based OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has put out a report on patterns of human rights violations against those defending such rights. In the report, the first of its kind, the ODIHR has examined patterns of human rights violations in the OSCE area from April 2006 to April 2007. Liberal daily Der Standard writes that US Ambassador to the OSCE Julie Finley, "a highly dedicated diplomat," obviously felt the blatant disregard of Russia and other former Soviet states of OSCE report's presentation was "the last straw." She "angrily demanded whether 'anyone in the audience did perhaps have a problem with human rights,'" the Standard quoted. Her inquiry was met with uncomfortable silence, according to the daily. Like the Standard, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says the report has identified four areas as being of particular concern: continuing physical attacks on human rights defenders; the curtailment of the freedom of association; the failure to respect and protect freedom of assembly; and restrictions placed on the freedom of movement and the right to liberty. Commenting on the role of human rights defenders, ODIHR Director, Ambassador Christian Strohal said: "They are at the forefront of efforts to secure human rights and hold governments to account. Human rights defenders are the lifeblood of a vibrant civil society and are the essence of any democratic society. They serve as our collective conscience." Strohal, an Austrian diplomat, underscored that "what we hope to see now is concrete follow up to these recommendations by OSCE states."

Kosovo Expects Freedom by May

¶5. A spokesman for the government in Kosovo says the province expects to win independence from Serbia before May 2008. The statement came after a meeting of Kosovo's ethnic Albanian leadership, on the day a UN deadline expired for agreement on the province's future status. Spokesman Skender Hyseni said Kosovo will look at its own agenda in the matter and added that independence might be realized even earlier than May, reports semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung.

Putin Names Successor

¶6. Russian President Vladimir Putin has named Dmitry Medvedev as his chosen successor, thus bringing to an end years of speculation about who might come next. Putin's support has put Medvedev, who had been listed among the possible front-runners, in the strongest possible position ahead of the March 2008 presidential election in Russia. Medvedev, a long-term ally of Putin, is a member of the circle of powerful Russians who began their careers in St. Petersburg. According to Austrian radio, Putin, who has described Medvedev as the "best possible candidate," apparently feels certain that his choice guarantees his political legacy will be upheld. The opposition parties, as expected, have criticized the announcement, describing the Russian President's candidate the "worst possible option." All Austrian media report on President Vladimir Putin's announcement Monday, expressing his support for First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev as his successor. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says that Putin has "let the cat out of the bag," and thus "ended the speculation regarding his successor." Centrist daily Die Presse in a front-page report headlines "42-year-old to succeed Putin," and suggests this particular "changing of the guards" in Russia "has come as a surprise." The daily point out that Medvedev is not a member of the Kremlin's intelligence service faction, which "makes power struggles all the more likely." Similarly, liberal daily Der Standard reports of "nervous tension in the Kremlin:" Following months of speculation, the Russian President has nominated

Medvedev, but "not all of Putin's staff can be counted on to back his chosen successor." However, the daily suggests, the First Deputy Prime Minister is "the perfect option, if Putin intends to return to power."

Kilner